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SUBJECT: SENEGAL: RELIGIOUS BROTHERHOODS' GROWING INFLUENCE ON
UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Senegal's public universities have enjoyed a long history of religious tolerance and secularism. During the past decade, however, they have witnessed an unprecedented growth of religious identity and expression. The dominance and influence of Sufi Muslim brotherhoods and the less mystical and more legalistic Ibadus on university campuses has created a unique microcosm which has sometimes led to violent conflict among the sects' younger followers. Growing evidence points to a departure from the post-independence secular separation of mosque and state in Senegalese higher education in favor of a growing role of religion in daily campus life. END SUMMARY.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

¶2. (SBU) Senegal's long tradition of secularism in education can be traced back to its first President, Lopold Sedar Senghor. As a former professor, his views on education emphasized a secular French education based on the arts and sciences. As a result, the Senegalese tertiary education system flourished as a bastion of tolerance focused on "educational enlightenment." In the past decade, a growing segment of the student body has embraced a more contrarian view based solely around religious devotion. With this, a lack of respect for divergent beliefs has caused tensions to mount between various groups. A University Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) English professor said that "Students never saw religion as an issue and it was hardly considered a controversy on campus. There have always been students within the university system who embraced somewhat radical leanings; however it was always around political ideology (i.e., socialist versus communist parties). The religious tension evident today goes against the traditional university way of thinking."

US VERSUS THEM

¶3. (SBU) Religious organizations have established their presence within campus life to a degree that has never been seen before. Students are encouraged to join based on their allegiance to a brotherhood. Once established within a group, members adhere to a new identity that transcends education within the university. The largest groups consist of various splinter organizations within the Mouride and Tijiane Sufi Islamic brotherhoods. Another growing segment on university campuses are the Ibadu. (NOTE: The Ibadu adhere to a stricter, legalistic Sunni interpretation of Islam and have gained a presence on several campuses. They abhor the Islamic brotherhoods, which are oriented around the veneration of saints and are relatively more mystical, as going against the true teachings of the Koran. END NOTE.) The Ibadus on UCAD's campus are advocates of single-sex dormitories rooms and more modest dress for all female students. Reports of students from other nations espousing radical Islamic views on campus could not be fully corroborated. Poloff received several reports of various students being taunted due to

their divergent religious beliefs while a UCAD Christian group alleged that several of their fliers were ripped off walls by Islamic brotherhood members. Another recent trend is loud religious Tijiane chanting lasting well into the night that disrupts other students, and praying on the floors of various academic buildings.

VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

14. (SBU) A recent incident at the University of Bambey (in Diourbel, northwestern Senegal, 146 kilometers from Dakar) highlights the growing tension on Senegalese campuses. A campus event sponsored by the Tijiane brotherhood turned violent after a Tijiane-invited guest began making controversial statements against other religious groups. Tijiane students were also found to be spreading materials during the event accusing the Mourides of Freemasonry (NOTE: Freemasonry is viewed very suspiciously in some sectors of Senegalese society which consider it incompatible with Islam. END NOTE.) Several students were injured as a result of rocks and other objects being hurled between the two groups. Tensions were diffused after the school administration and a Mouride caliph were dispatched to calm tensions between the irate students.

OTHER INCIDENTS

15. (SBU) Another recent incident at UCAD witnessed Tchantacune students attacking a campus security guard after they were asked to lower their voices while chanting evening prayers. (The Tchantacune are an armed militant branch of the Mourides with a following among poor urban youth.) Poloff has also received reports of student tension revolving around control of campus mosques. (NOTE: The

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Ibadus built and run the mosque on the UCAD campus, but in 2006 tension erupted when Tijiane students attempted to gain control of the mosque. University of Bambey officials are wary of building a mosque for this reason in spite of Ibadu students having funds to build one. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Strong indications point to a concerted effort by the Muslim brotherhoods and other groups towards imposing their respective wills upon university campuses. With this, a general lack of tolerance and respect for divergent religious views has pervaded Senegalese university campuses. The feeling that one's outlook is superior to another's has resulted in skirmishes. These incidents can be considered part of a larger trend within Senegal's younger generation towards handling sectarian differences with confrontation instead of tolerance. President Senghor's hope of establishing a secular model of higher education is further from realization than before.

SMITH